Building Resilient Enterprises in the Pacific

Scaling Frontier Innovation COVID-19 Response

April 2021
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This report was prepared by ygap and Talanoa Consulting, design and implementing partners of SFI COVID-19 response.
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1.0 Introduction
Background

The global pandemic has had a significant impact on local communities and the economies of the Pacific Islands. The tourism sector suffered the largest economic impacts, followed by those sectors involved in cross-border trade in agricultural products, garments and manufactured goods as a result of a general global decline in demand and disruptions to freight.

Underpinning this are hundreds of small and medium enterprises dependent on these industries directly and indirectly. With thousands of job losses across the region, all small businesses and social enterprises reliant on consumer spending have been feeling the ripple effects of the current crisis. Under normal circumstances many business owners and wage earners are supporting extended family networks and this has placed additional pressure on those in employment.

Given the proven capacity of social enterprises to create employment for those most disadvantaged, whilst also contributing towards economic growth and delivering other social and community benefits, supporting these businesses represents an important part of responding to and recovering from this crisis.

Recognising this, the Scaling Frontier Innovation (SFI) Response program has been working to support social entrepreneurship and its partners across the region since July 2020, with a particular focus on developing capabilities to adapt and respond to challenges presented by COVID-19.

About the SFI Response Program in the Pacific

The SFI COVID-19 Response program in the Pacific Islands was delivered as part of the SFI program, which is an initiative of the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT). The program supports social enterprises to scale their development impact in the Asia Pacific Region. The SFI program comprises three components that focus on different but interconnected parts of the ecosystem that supports social enterprises, including entrepreneurs, incubators and accelerators, and brokers.

Recognising the economic impact of the COVID-19 crisis on entrepreneurs and entrepreneur support organisations, and in line with SFI program goals, the SFI response program designed and delivered a structured short-term program to support social entrepreneurship in the Pacific. The program worked with seven social enterprises (SEs) and six entrepreneurship support organisations (ESOs).

Timeline:
Design: May - June 2020
Implementation: August 2020 - February 2021
1.0 Introduction

The Design and Implementing Team

ygap is an international development organisation that believes in eradicating poverty through the power of locally-led social entrepreneurship. Their global team runs accelerator programmes to directly support early stage impact ventures across the Pacific Islands, Bangladesh, Kenya, South Africa and Australia. Their approach to sustainable development is one that empowers local entrepreneurs to build market based solutions to social and environmental problems within their own communities in line with the Sustainable Development Goals. ygap also works as a consultancy, under the name ygap Collaborations, to undertake global programmes of work that aim to build a more accessible, inclusive, equitable and sustainable entrepreneurial ecosystem for those enterprises to succeed. They do this through powerful collaborations between the private, public and not for profit sectors, where they work to build and strengthen entrepreneurship support systems, accessible markets and finance, as well as human capital. They apply a gender lens across all of their work, and have a strong focus on impact measurement.

Their first hand experience as an entrepreneurship support organisation working with social enterprises across the Pacific Islands region, as well as their background as a core implementing partner for the Frontier Incubators program under the SFI initiative, allowed ygap to run a contextualised, adaptive and tailored response program across the region. They were able to offer expert support to both social enterprises and ESOs in defining the scope of their activities under this program of work, all whilst leading on the program design, delivery and implementation.

Talanoa Consulting is a small, multi-disciplinary consultancy firm based in Suva, serving Fiji and the Pacific Islands. Their team works across various areas including climate change, disaster risk reduction and resilience, agriculture and food security, gender equality and women’s economic empowerment, environmental conservation, natural resource management, and small business and social enterprise development, particularly tourism and agribusiness. They ensure that Pacific approaches are embedded within their service delivery in research, social and economic analysis, project design and management, monitoring and evaluation, knowledge brokering, designing and implementing training and capacity development, workshop, conference and event facilitation.

Their interconnecting areas of expertise were highly relevant to ensuring that the programme design was rooted in the reality of the current situation. As a small business based in Fiji themselves they are also connected to various networks, including the Women’s Entrepreneurs Business Council, and were able to provide insights into the conversations, needs and priorities of small and medium enterprises during a time in which these were changing as the uncertainty relating to the pandemic’s impacts, particularly on the impact of the ongoing border closures on tourism, freight and logistics.
2.0 Program Design
Program Design

The Design Process

Needs Assessment

The first step of the design process involved a needs, risks and opportunities assessment that was performed with SEs and ESOs from the SFI Program’s existing social entrepreneurship network across the Pacific Islands. The assessment, which consisted of 60-90 minute dialogues conducted virtually with each organisation, aimed to understand the specific impacts of Covid-19 on the context and operations of these organisations, and help inform the role that the SFI Program can play in supporting them to respond to challenges, risks and opportunities, and in building their resilience against the current and future crises. The learnings from the dialogues were summarised in a separate report, which you can access here.

Developing the Program Design

The learnings from the needs assessment, paired with ygap and Talanoa Consulting’s context specific knowledge, informed the development of a 4-6 month program that would help participating organisations build their resilience and respond to the impacts of the pandemic. A draft design was then shared with the ESOs and SEs through 30 minute feedback calls so that they would have an opportunity to further input into the design.

Final Program Design

- Social Enterprise program: integrated support and training program that provides SEs with approximately A$15,000 of support, divided across technical assistance and catalytic grants, accompanied by on call support from the implementing team as well as optional peer-to-peer thematics.

- Entrepreneur Support Organization program: support program that provided ESOs with approximately A$30,000 of support for them to carry out a series of activities aimed at building their own organisation’s and/or their enterprises’ resilience in response to the pandemic, accompanied by on call support from the implementing team as well as optional peer-to-peer thematics.

This support was to be provided to the ESOs and SEs through:

- The development and implementation of tailored response plans that are locally-owned, adaptable, tailored, and would be created by each organisation with support from the implementing partners. The response plans were to be focussed on activities that would be catalytic for the organisations, to allow them to build their resilience in response to the crisis. The organisations would decide for themselves how their funding would be divided between technical assistance versus grant funding for SEs and technical assistance versus project funding for ESOs within the program scope.

- Each participating organisation would be provided with a SFI Response lead from ygap or Talanoa Consulting who would perform regular check ins with them and provide on call support. Those leads were allocated based on relevant expertise, contextual knowledge and networks to provide further support and value to program participants as they carried out their activities.

- Thematics and events would be available to allow for valuable peer to peer exchanges and connections with like minded leaders in the ecosystem to occur.

Response Plans

With the design finalised, an expression of interest process was then run where the implementing partners worked with interested organisations to come up with a high level, tailored proposal for how they would leverage the program to build resilience. Once approved to be within scope, more detailed plans were then developed by each organisation.
What We Learned Through the Design Process

What Worked Well

- Dialogues as a medium. Given the limitations around travel and in-person gatherings at the time of the design process, the implementing team conducted virtual dialogues, which ultimately allowed for deeper engagement than surveys would have, and were valuable in establishing rapport and shared context. Conversations helped to build trust with participants, address negative power dynamics and battle survey fatigue. It also allowed us to reinforce that the participants had full ownership of the suggested activities and ensured that they weren’t suggesting activities that they perceived to be of interest to donor. The discussion guides allowed for flexibility in the conversation whilst also structuring the data collected, making it easier to uncover themes to compare and find synergies between the organisations. Sharing the notes back with the participants after the dialogues gave them the opportunity to provide feedback, use their own data in the future, and ensure that the information collected was accurate and relevant.

- Contextual knowledge from the implementing partners. Although ideally the discussions would have taken place in person, the implementing team had a deep understanding of the Pacific Islands context, tourism in the Pacific Islands, and of the social entrepreneurship space, making the survey development process and rapport building relatively straightforward.

- Needs-based and locally-led design. As opposed to designing a one-size fits all support program that would see all enterprises taking part in the same support activities, and all ESOs taking part in one type of capacity building program, designing a locally-led, adaptable and tailored response program recognised the diversity of the contexts and organisations that operate across the Pacific Islands region, as well as the fact that each organisation is best placed to determine what would be most impactful for them.

- Timing. Performing a fast program design meant that support was able to be provided in a timely manner, given the urgency of the situation.

- Building on past programming. DFAT had existing relationships with the participating organisations, so this program provided an opportunity to continue their support.

What Could Be Improved

- Trust and transparency. Entrepreneurs were very honest and engaged, and were open to sharing their challenges and needs, as were the more independent ESOs that operated with a similar model to social enterprises. This may in part be due to the fact that the SEs participating in the design process had been previously engaged with and were therefore familiar with support programs, making it easier to establish rapport and trust. The ESOs that were more quasi-government or linked to government funding were more reserved in their engagement in dialogue. This may be due to the power-imbalance of the “funder-beneficiary” relationship.

- Scope. Given the unique nature of how this program came about, in response to unprecedented global circumstances, the design process took place without full clarity around the scope and budget available for the program of work, which made managing expectations and communications with the participants during the design process challenging, as the implementing team didn’t want to overpromise.

- Uncertainty. The lack of clarity around the duration of the pandemic and its resulting medium and long term impacts on the economies of the Pacific Islands made it challenging to plan. This made the adaptable program design even more important. There were also factors of political instability to take into consideration for some countries and adverse weather events.
3.0 Program Delivery
Social Enterprises

Key Results

As a result of the program, Social Enterprises:

- **Pivoted, tested and expanded to new markets.** Combined, the seven enterprises who received direct support as part of this program tested 22 new products and services, made up of 17 consumer products, and two products and three services for business customers. Four of them developed completely new business models, three of which were formally launched within the program. The support obtained enabled the enterprises to manage the time and financial risks involved in testing new markets, and provided them with additional expertise and confidence to pivot and diversify their activities amidst an unpredictable climate. These new business models, products and services have resulted in the enterprises securing more than 180 new customers within the span of the program, generating revenue for themselves and for the businesses they support through their supply chains, and creating four new jobs at a time of high unemployment.

- **Grew a strong domestic brand.** Five of the enterprises used the program as a catalyst to establish and/or strengthen their brands within their respective domestic market. With borders closing, imports decreasing and there being a strong interest in supporting local businesses, enterprises saw an opportunity to move quickly and grow their share of the domestic market. Through working with advisors, leveraging program events as well as investing in the development of key marketing assets, participants were able to gain exposure to key stakeholders, acquire new customers and generate additional income. With key assets on hand, they will continue to build brand awareness and trust as the world recovers from the pandemic.

- **Developed a strategic and resilient mindset.** The program provided a key opportunity for entrepreneurs to take a step back and ‘work on their business’ versus within their business. This was noted as being a key benefit of the program, as it allowed entrepreneurs to stop being reactive to the unpredictability of their environment, and instead approach their response to the pandemic in a more considered and strategic way. The support provided through the advisors, the program implementing team and the thematics all aimed to foster strategic and resilient responses. This has resulted in strong and sustainable foundations being laid for the enterprises to not only recover but grow their operations, and in entrepreneurs who feel more confident in their ability to manage crises.

Story Highlights

Note that full profiles of each enterprise can be found in a separate document, on the SFI website.

- **The Fusion Hub (Fiji)** primary market of upcycling waste materials into high end furniture for consumers and hotels was significantly impacted by covid-19. After observing a change in consumer behaviour during the pandemic (bulk buying of hygiene products, food products, etc), founder Sagufta Janif decided to diversify her business by developing a pay forward, subscription-based model called Zero Waste Hub where Fijians can purchase staple products in bulk without excessive amounts of plastic packaging and have these delivered directly to them. The model provides income and employment to women through their supply chain. Participating in the SFI Response Program has equipped Janif with the skills to make strategic, calculated business decisions and she’s been able to hire two new staff members as well as provide additional income to four women-led businesses as part of her supply chain.
Entrepreneurship Support Organisations (ESOs)

Working with ESOs was key to extending DFAT’s support to a greater number of social enterprises across the Pacific Islands at a time when many enterprises were looking to access support.

Key Results

As a result of the program, ESOs:

- Provided business resiliency support to a greater number of enterprises. Two new support programs were created and three existing programs were revamped to better meet the needs of enterprises. 41 enterprises were incubated and received deep support in building their business resilience. Another 200+ received support across a series of workshops, mentor sessions and tailored events delivered by the ESOs. All programs and events received overwhelmingly positive feedback from the enterprises who engaged in them. Gender and social inclusion was taken into account through all programs, with some specifically focussed on support for women founders, and others taking place in rural communities.

- Strengthened their own resilience and capacity to deliver support to enterprises. All of the ESOs took part in some form of capacity building through the program. For some, this involved engaging external advisors to coach their team, whilst for others it involved having the team who is developing the new programming train others (team members, inhouse trainers, external stakeholders involved in the delivery of their programs) through a train the trainer model. The capacity building mainly focussed on one of two areas: (1) strengthening the local capacity of trainers and mentors to better serve and support enterprises, and (2) building the longer term sustainability and resilience of the ESO itself. As a result of the program, 100% of ESOs reported that their confidence has increased in their ability to support their entrepreneurs to build their resilience and work through challenging times.

The support was customized to my company’s needs and we are able to smoothly diversify our products and services. The program has allowed me to be more strategic as an entrepreneur and make calculated decisions, which has made me and my business more resilient. We have been able to diversify our activities and now have several income streams.”

-Sagufta Janif, The Fusion Hub
Story Highlights

- **Samoa Business Hub** leveraged the program as an opportunity to grow their support to their client enterprises, most of whom were very negatively impacted by the pandemic. Instead of rushing to provide ad hoc reactive short term support, they decided to invest time and resources in redesigning their main ‘cohort program’, which was an optional program that provided loan management support to the 586 loan recipients (client enterprises) within their portfolio. The funding went towards redesigning the structure and governance of the program, expanding the focus of the support to include business resilience coaching and networking events. To ensure the quality of the program, they performed capacity building with 76 key stakeholders involved in delivering it, including their team, trainers and the executives nominated to lead the various cohorts. They held their first networking event as part of their new revamped program, which involved 192 stakeholders ranging from enterprises to experts and mentors, and focussed on digital inclusion. This is now part of their core programming and support for any existing and new enterprises that engage with their services, and also has the benefit of being a key channel for SBH to reach their clients and perform impact measurement as well as early interventions if one of their clients is likely to go into arrears.

- **V-Lab** ran a 5 month incubation program for 10 enterprises based in Vanuatu. They also leveraged the program to design effective and new ways to support small and medium sized enterprises, as well as to work with a technical advisor to build their own resilience and financial sustainability in the long term. The program has helped V-Lab increase their visibility and traction, particularly in regard to donors and partners. It has also enabled them to use this additional incubation program to develop the skills and expertise of local business coaches as part of a partnership with Business Link Pacific.
Program Delivery

Locally-Led

Understanding the context in each Pacific Island Country is critical to providing effective support, and the SEs and ESOs taking part in this program were best placed to design the support that would best fit their needs and context, and be catalytic for them in building their own resilience.

Key Results

- Greater impact achieved by building on existing activities. For some organisations, this meant using the funding to build on and continue activities that were already having an impact prior to the pandemic. For Agora Food Studio, this meant building on the coaching program they had started to establish with support from USAID, and the mentorship from Akina they had accessed through SFI. This funding was catalytic in implementing, adapting and growing the model they had developed, instead of starting a completely new activity, and meant they were able to offer support to their enterprises right away. Likewise, FEE used the response program to adapt, build on and deliver their accelerator program, which was left underfunded as a result of the pandemic. They were able to support additional enterprises in a timely manner as well as strengthen their curriculum for future programming and host impactful events.

- Participant growth through leading the design of their own support plans. Leading the design and implementation of their activities under the SFI Response program was an exercise for the ESOs and SEs to reflect on the impacts of covid-19 on their organisation, and prioritise the most catalytic activities that would enable them to respond and build their long term resilience. From selecting technical advisors to selecting the split of their funding across various expense types, the process was locally-led with support from the implementing team.

% of SEs & ESOs that found that the program was:

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<th></th>
<th>very helpful</th>
<th>quite helpful</th>
<th>somewhat helpful</th>
<th>a little helpful</th>
<th>not at all helpful</th>
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<td>SEs</td>
<td>71.4%</td>
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<td>28.6%</td>
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<tr>
<td>ESOs</td>
<td>66.7%</td>
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<td>33.3%</td>
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Adaptable

It was critical that as the situation evolved, support to social entrepreneurs and ESOs also evolved. The context is continuously changing and policy decisions - to expand support to employers and businesses, or reopen borders, for example - can have a significant impact on the most sensible course of action. It was therefore important to allow for the flexibility to adapt activities to changing on-the-ground dynamics in order for the support to be effective in achieving results. Regular monthly check-ins were scheduled to ensure the evolving context was reflected in the support provided.

Key Results

- Achieving meaningful outcomes despite adverse weather and health events. The activities of our Fiji based participants were impacted by a series of severe weather events, whilst our Samoa based participants had to navigate lockdowns in response to active cases of COVID-19, which impacted their in person programs. Those impacted were able to work with the implementing team to quickly adapt their plans and either pivot to alternative activities or re-arrange timelines. This enabled them to maximise their funding and activities to achieve meaningful outcomes.

- Enabling effective responses to evolving challenges, risks and opportunities. Testing and implementing new business ideas and ways of doing things can be challenging at the best of times, let alone in a global pandemic. All of the participants had to adapt at least one of their planned activities during the course of the program, whether that was the result of opportunities they uncovered through research, roadblocks they didn’t expect to encounter along the way or alternative funding they were able to access for certain activities. Having agency to be able to do so quickly, within the scope of the program, meant that they were able to effectively respond and make the most of the support provided for their organisation.

% of SEs & ESOs that found that the program was:

- very helpful
- quite helpful
- somewhat helpful
- a little helpful
- not at all helpful
- did not access

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<tr>
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<th>SEs</th>
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<tr>
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<td>42.9%</td>
<td>83.3%</td>
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<td>quite helpful</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
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<td>somewhat helpful</td>
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Tailored

The needs assessment revealed that each SE and ESO faced different challenges and opportunities, so it was important that the support provided be tailored to their specific needs to be effective. The scope of the program allowed for a significant level of customization whereby each organisation was able to determine what activities would be most beneficial and catalytic for them.

Key Results

• Optimised use of funding. Within the scope of the program, all participants were able to decide on how to best use the support made available to them to meet their organisation’s evolving needs. As an example, 37% of the funding made available to SEs was used to engage technical advisors, versus 63% which was used for a mix of equipment purchases, market research, product tests, etc. This flexibility allowed participants to focus on maximising the support that was provided so that it would be catalytic in helping them build resilience.

• Contextualised and meaningful support. There is so much diversity in the types of ESOs and SEs across the Pacific Islands. Whilst financial sustainability was of concern to some ESOs, it wasn’t as much of a focus for others who have established funding sources and are not at risk of shutting down their operations. Whilst some enterprises saw their main markets disappear as a result of the impact of covid-19, others saw an opportunity to increase their market share. The tailored nature of the program allowed for ‘resilience’ to look differently for different organisations, as opposed to a one size fits all program. This resulted in more meaningful and sustainable outcomes.

% of SEs & ESOs that found that the program was:

very tailored | a little tailored | not at all tailored | did not access
---|---|---|---
SEs | 57.1% | 42.9% |   |   |
ESOs | 66.7% | 33.3% |   |   |

“Excellent initiative, definitely with the unpredictable climate we are in, the flexibility and adaptability of the program is what is most needed in these times so we can provide the most appropriate support in a timely manner.”
- Rosemary Tone, Samoa Business Hub

“These are the types of organizations we want to work with. Adaptive and looking to support those who need the support the most.”
- Hobart Vaai, Samoa Chamber of Commerce
Through A Gender And Inclusion Lens

The current health, economic and social crises continue to emphasise the importance of accessible and inclusive funding as well as programming. This program was deliberate about considering how funding can be used to support gender equality and women economic empowerment, as well as how responses can be made more inclusive of and accessible to marginalised groups. Amongst the social enterprises engaged in the program, five were women-led ventures and all seven were supporting women through their work, whether as employees or beneficiaries. All ESOs also considered gender within their activities.

Highlights

Note that all of the participants had gender and social inclusion considerations embedded in their programming. The below are only highlights.

- Advancing gender equality for rural women through supply chains. All of the enterprises that received direct support as part of this program are creating income generating opportunities for women, a lot of them focusing on women from rural areas. For example, under their new business model, the Fusion Hub provides increased income opportunities to women-led businesses through their supply chain, and have started training communities of women in developing sustainable products such as coconut bowls as part of their own range of products.

- Making support programs more accessible for and inclusive of women-led SMEs. All of the programs delivered by ESOs considered how they could increase access and inclusion for women entrepreneurs as well as other underrepresented groups. For example, the Fiji Enterprise Engine (FEE) program offered subsidised places for the 8 women-led businesses that took part in their program. Agora Studio conducted a Digital Marketing Exchange specifically for women Timorese tourism entrepreneurs after observing that women weren’t as comfortable to engage in a mixed gender session. Samoa Business Hub ensured the venues they hired for all meetings and training were accessible, and female participants were explicitly encouraged to share their knowledge and experience, to ensure their participation was equal to their male peers.

- Addressing barriers to women-led enterprise growth. Several of the events and thematics held throughout the program focussed on increasing the exposure of women-led businesses to new customers, as well as discussing the unique challenges that women face in building their enterprises and growing their teams. A lot of the enterprises also focussed on removing barriers to market access for women-led businesses. For example, the shared kitchen platform that Tasty Island Treats launched as part of their new company Tasty Kitchen Collective is soon to be home to 7 businesses, all of which are women owned and operated.

“Mama’s Laef Vanuatu has been able to strengthen our platform to support women through this funding. As a direct result of this funding, we are about to undertake more trials of sales people in the outer islands. Increasing opportunities for women to make small money and to help break down barriers and taboo about menstruation.”

- Jack and Mary Kalsrap, Mamma’s Laef Vanuatu
Program Delivery Components

Grant Funding For SEs

Catalytic grants of up to AUD$7,500 were made available to social enterprises. The exact amount of grant finance and accompanying technical assistance and mentorship provided for each enterprise was co-designed with the entrepreneur through a deeper dive into where their organisation was at and what was the most catalytic project for them to undertake at the time to build their resilience, innovate and grow.

Key Results

- **New products and services tested and successfully launched into the market.** The program funded the testing of 22 new products and services across 7 enterprises. The grant funding was key to reducing the risk for SEs to test new products and services, allowing them to invest time and resources into testing new models even though their operations had been significantly impacted by COVID-19. For example, the grant funding allowed the Fusion Hub to test and validate the demand for their new range of environmentally friendly consumer products, which saw them sell out of all of their supplies within six hours, being purchased by 109 homes, and making $4000. This allowed them to de-risk and validate their new model, and they are now able to feel confident about investing further into growing it. For Kokonut Pacific Solomon Islands (KPSI), the grant funding enabled them to work with a buyer in Australia to perform market testing in a brand new area, namely value-added products. The funding acted as a catalyst for getting the market research and testing on these products done at a time when it wouldn’t have happened otherwise. Outside of funding key activities to test new markets, which in itself contributed towards building resilience, grant funding was also used to purchase key equipment (often matched by other funding sources) and fund activities that were catalytic in moving from the testing stage to launching new products or services into the market.

- **Strong foundations laid for sustainable and resilient growth.** The grant funding was also used to establish a strong foundation for sustainable growth beyond the program. Some of the SEs used part of their funding to subsidise their own team costs to allow them to engage fully in the technical advisory support provided, and the actions that resulted from it, which led to more value being extracted from those engagements. Others used their funding to invest in the development of key marketing assets, which will increase their visibility for years to come, or in equipment that will help them build their physical resilience against adverse weather events.

100% of the entrepreneurs found the grant funding very helpful. Many entrepreneurs commented that the grant funding was crucial in undertaking new activities that allowed them to pivot their business.

“Without it we would not have progressed”
- Bob Pollard, Kokonut Pacific Solomon

“Allowed us to manage storage and power outage issues. As well as boosting business performance”
- Fanny Fitelli, Mama’s Mushrooms

“This grant was such a blessing. I was able to get everything I needed to get off the ground”
- Nakita Bingham-Irvin, Tasty Island Treats Fiji

“The grant funds that went towards our marketing material is invaluable as we will be able to use the videos, icons and testimonials for years to come. The equipment that we were able to purchase has enabled us to provide new services in Suva”
- Jonina Wetzell, Kahuto Pacific Investments
Project Funding For ESOs

The six entrepreneur support organisations (ESOs) were provided with up to $30,000 AUD of funding each to undertake a specific project, which partly covered program design and delivery, and partly covered technical assistance and mentorship in designing and delivering that project, based on gaps in expertise.

**Key Results**

- **Design and delivery of new support programs for entrepreneurs.** The program funded the design, testing and delivery of a new 5-month incubation program in Vanuatu, which was delivered to support 10 entrepreneurs. This involved in-depth support provided by business coaches through training and coaching sessions, and saw the enterprises increasing their combined revenue significantly (4.75 x) between the beginning and the end of the program. It also led to the design and delivery of a new business resilience program in Samoa, a first of its kind, which supported 79 enterprises in building their resilience, covering topics including financial survival, supporting your team through COVID-19, e-commerce, pivoting your business and preparing for the new normal.

- **Redesign or extension of existing programs to better support entrepreneurs.** The program funded the redesign and delivery of a Fiji-based accelerator program that supported 15 entrepreneurs. This involved drawing on local business coaches to develop a program that builds an enterprise’s business adaptability to the new normal and builds business sustainability by addressing the enterprise’s ability to recalibrate and address opportunities created through COVID-19. It also funded the redesign of a well-established enterprise support program in Samoa, which previously focussed solely on providing loan management support to 586 loan recipients. The funding went towards revising the fundamental nature of the program, which involved adding rigour to its management and structure, expanding the focus of the support to include business resilience coaching and networking events, and performing capacity building with 76 key stakeholders involved in delivering it. Finally, the program funded the revision and extension of a previously USAID funded program in Timor-Leste to support 16 enterprises and deepen the coaching and support provided to help enterprises pivot and survive the tourism downturn resulting from COVID-19.

“This funding allowed us to focus on the support we can offer through our cohort programs across the country. We recognised that quality was important for us to deliver a meaningful program and so we took a step back and designed a program that would set a strong foundation for cohorts and coaching programs in the future. Working with staff and executive teams to build a constitution and design the cohorts in a way that will be sustainable.

Participants scored the program highly at an average of 4.82 for the overall workshops and gave very positive feedback on their learnings. Staff also shared their appreciation on the knowledge gaps they were able to address in the capacity building training they were a part of with the Training of Trainers and specialised Master classes. The capacity building training and master classes in formal Samoan language was a huge success through the SFI Program.”

- Rosemary Tone, Samoa Business Hub
3.0 Program Delivery

- Strengthened resilience of ESOs across the Pacific Islands. Outside of the design and delivery of programs to support entrepreneurs, which in itself contributes to ESOs’ resilience, the program funded key activities that allowed ESOs to build their long term capacity and resilience. This included developing and strengthening key internal processes and systems. For one of the ESOs, based in the Cook Islands, the program funded the development of an e-commerce platform, which aims to become an additional source of revenue for the ESO, and provide further market access for their enterprises given the small size of the domestic market.

“The systems, processes and procedures developed by V-Lab during the program will be replicated in the future, thus strengthening the capacity of V-Lab to deliver quality services to more and more entrepreneurs.”
- Marc-Antoine Morel, V-Lab

“The program most importantly enabled us to take stock of our business situation. We are currently 90% reliant on tourists to operate. This program has allowed us along with our clients to research the value of our unique proposition and the potential of the marketplace. Where others have focused on short term initiatives we have looked to develop a long term sustainable and scalable alternative platform/model to conduct a Pasifika value based community business with access to a global market.”
- Stan Wolfgramm, Te Ara Museum

“It was really eye-opening to have someone of Steve’s experience share and guide us in thinking about alternatives to our logistics and also look at a bigger picture. The knowledge and experience and connections were very valuable”
- Fanny Fitelli, Mama’s Mushrooms

“Thanks to the coaching provided by Spring Incubator, V-Lab came to realize, among other things, the need to develop a financial sustainability strategy and model. V-Lab therefore decided to develop a “pay for service” facility which will offer training and coaching to different types of entrepreneurs. This structure called “The V-Lab Bisnis Nakamal” is expected to be launched on 1st March 2021.”
- Marc-Antoine Morel, V-Lab

Technical Assistance

Technical assistance formed a key component of the SFI Response Program. All participants engaged with technical advisors, however the depth, length and nature of those engagements varied based on needs. SEs and ESOs were able to nominate the advisors they wanted to work with. Some performed their own research, whilst others already had advisors they had met or worked with in the past. For those who didn’t know who to engage, they were supported by the implementing team to find suitable advisors. Where possible, local advisors were offered first. Ultimately, the decision was made by the SEs and ESOs as to who they wanted to formally engage.
Key Results

- **Long term, strategic thinking and contextualised business strategies.** The program funded five business advisors to provide one-on-one coaching to four SEs and two ESOs, resulting in them strengthening their strategic mindsets and developing medium to long term strategies that aim to build their organisations’ resilience. Depending on the focus, context and strategic gaps of each organisation, the support provided ranged from focussing on developing and implementing a financial sustainability strategy to providing support across pivoting a business, product development and management, scaling operations, developing a fundraising strategy, logistics and supply chain management, and more.

- **Growth-focussed marketing strategies and other technical assistance.** The program provided funding for three SEs to work closely with local marketing experts in developing their marketing strategies and assets. For all three, this involved capitalising on gaps that were created in the market as a result of the pandemic, which created opportunities for them to either increase their current market share or launch new products and services. The marketing strategies resulted in the acquisition of new customers and sales. Other technical advisors were engaged to provide specific advice around key legal challenges, technology matters, etc.

> “Greenhouse were excellent in providing their marketing skills in producing our marketing outputs”
> - Jonina Wetzell, Kahuto Pacific Investments

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>% of SEs &amp; ESOs that found that the technical advisors were:</th>
<th>very helpful</th>
<th>quite helpful</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>SEs</strong></td>
<td>85.7%</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
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<td><strong>ESOs</strong></td>
<td>83.3%</td>
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3.0 Program Delivery

On Call Support

On call support was provided by the team at ygap and Talanoa Consulting throughout the program from experts within their teams who understand the entrepreneurship space as well as the region. They conducted monthly check ins with each of the organisations to keep track of progress and to offer tailored and proactive support along the way. The latter allowed the team to stay on top of the fast evolving context and adapt the support accordingly.

Key Results

- **Effective and outcomes-based reallocation of funds.** Almost all of the participants adapted or changed at least one of their planned activities throughout the program. Every time this occurred, participants would work with the implementing team to revise their activities and ensure they remained within scope, thereby maximising the use of the funds. FEE, for example, was able to obtain alternative funding to subsidise some of their entrepreneurs’ cost to participate in their program. They were able to reallocate the funding planned for this activity towards hosting a series of powerful webinars for their entrepreneurs.

- **Additional connections and expert guidance.** Having implementing leads who understand and have worked in the region means that additional support was able to be provided in the form of introductions and connections within the local ecosystem. For example, Kahuto Pacific Investments were able to leverage some of Talanoa Consulting’s development and conservation contacts by way of a networking event in Suva to open doors to new possible markets.

% of SEs & ESOs that found that the 1:1 catch-ups were:

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Thematic Webinars

A series of thematic webinars and in person events were held to facilitate peer-to-peer discussion, problem solving and collaboration amongst the program participants.

Two thematic sessions were held for entrepreneurs in person in Fiji, covering the topic of expanding and testing new markets, and growing your team. The first session was split into two components: a knowledge sharing exchange between entrepreneurs that have worked over the last few months to pivot their businesses to new market opportunities or are in the process of doing so; and a guided walkthrough of best practice, alongside breakout groups/paired work. The second session was an open discussion that aimed to equip ventures with shared insights (challenges, dynamics) and best practise (expert advisory/tips) in how to formalise and grow human resources.

The three sessions held for ESOs covered a comprehensive discussion about growing the local advisory ecosystem in the Pacific Islands. The objective of the first session was to understand the needs of ESOs in regards to mentors and coaches. The remaining sessions focused on ideating on strategies to grow the local advisory ecosystem, determine what is needed to action these, and discuss strategies for scaling services to support enterprises that are emerging as a result of the current economic climate.

Blog posts summarising the learnings from the thematics can be found on the Scaling Frontier Innovation website.

% of SEs & ESOs that found that the forums were:

- very helpful
- quite helpful
- somewhat helpful
- a little helpful
- not at all helpful
- did not access

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<th>SEs</th>
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<td>very helpful</td>
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Fiji Food Entrepreneurship Event

A ‘Food Entrepreneurship Celebration’ event was held in December 2020 at the Australian High Commission in Fiji. There were 10 agrifood enterprises present, including SFI Response participants Tasty Island Treats, The Fusion Hub and Mama’s Mushrooms, and 4 enterprises from the Fiji Enterprise Engine. The event served as an important networking opportunity for these entrepreneurs, as well as an opportunity to increase their direct sales.

The event brought together chefs, food entrepreneurs, agribusinesses and producers to celebrate Fijian innovation and entrepreneurship. It highlighted the support provided through this response program to enterprises and enterprise support organisations, and was held in partnership with the Pacific Island Food Revolution, yher, the Fiji Enterprise Engine and the Pacific Agribusiness Research and Development Initiative.

In addition to supporting local entrepreneurship through the businesses featured, local actors were engaged in all facets of its organisation.

The following agrifood enterprises were present at the event:

- Waitika Farm Fiji
- The Fusion Hub
- Taleitaki Enterprises
- Marama Niu
- Wainuqa Farmers Co-operative Limited
- KokoMana PTE Ltd
- Tasty Kitchen Collective
- Mama’s Mushrooms
- Mad Hatter Hutt
- Niu Grillz
Feedback From Participants

55.6% of respondents indicated that the event had exposed them to enterprises they were not previously aware of, and 22.2% learnt more about enterprises they were already familiar with.

88.9% of respondents made contacts that would definitely be helpful to their business in the future, and 11.1% made contacts that might be helpful. Respondents indicated that they made a few crucial contacts for potential collaboration in the future, namely pertaining to supply chain development, business development and marketing. Of those that made useful contacts, 55.6% have already reached out to these new networks.

For 33.3% of respondents, these contacts or the event itself translated into direct sales for their business, and 22.2% believe these will translate into direct sales in the future. Those who benefited most mentioned that a number of the contacts made at the event have made orders from their business and are now on their delivery lists as very enthusiastic customers.

100% of respondents indicated either them or their partners posted on their business social media pages about the event, and of these, all of them received new likes, followers and comments. One of the participants noted “We did 9 posts - highest reach was 3.4k, new followers and likes 196, comments, over 100 comments counting all posts.” Another participant reported 1000 engagements on their social media platforms.

77.8% of respondents said the event was excellent overall, and 22.2% reported it good.

Case Study: Creating Opportunities Through Powerful Events

During the food entrepreneurship event at the High Commission, Mama's Mushrooms founder Fanny Fitelli made a number of valuable contacts. She has already had a meeting with Marlene Dutta, the Regional Director for Good Return, where they discussed the cash pool necessary for Mama's Mushrooms to achieve their goal of having 3000 farmers by 2030. Fitelli also met the Permanent Secretary of Agriculture, who was very impressed with the enterprise's bottled products and was surprised to have not heard of Mama's Mushrooms before. Fitelli will be meeting with him again in a few weeks to discuss ways in which the local government can support the venture through farm set up, access road grading and an additional cooler container. Fitelli met with the Fiji Market Development Facility and discussed how Mama's Mushrooms can be part of their gift baskets. She also met a representative of the US Embassy and discussed procurement opportunities. Investment Fiji, the trade promotion agency of the Fijian government, was interested in featuring Mama's Mushrooms and having their produce as part of their annual conference for investors. Finally, there was also a discussion with HACCP regarding certification for Mama's Mushrooms' pickles. As Fitelli continues to follow up with the contacts gained from this event, Mama's Mushrooms' presence in Fiji and internationally will only grow faster, as will the opportunities for collaboration and scaling.

“Was an excellent event and had great exposure. Being out of the hub of Suva I don’t get much opportunity to present to these kinds of people so it was fantastic to be able to do so!”

“We would love to take part in something like this again. It was great to see all the local foodpreneurs and their innovative businesses. It’s eye opening and very informative. There is so much talent in this beautiful country of ours!”

“Amazing event, the first of it's kind and hopefully not the last!”
4.0 Learnings and Recommendations
What We Learned Through The Delivery Process

This section highlights key lessons learned and recommendations from across the SFI Response program of work.

- **Adopting a tailored and adaptable approach in the face of uncertainty** to meet each organisation’s needs within their respective sector and context was key to achieving meaningful results in a short amount of time. Given the amount of uncertainty and unpredictability in how things would evolve as a result of the pandemic in 2020, it was important to have the processes in place to support participating organisations to operate with agility and flexibility. Given health and social challenges, as well as adverse weather events, do occur regularly in the Pacific Islands, we suggest that a similar approach to programming could be beneficial, even outside of a pandemic. Although not always feasible, having the option to extend the timing of the program, or including a buffer at the end, can also be beneficial in order for participants to prioritise quality outcomes over fast outputs where unexpected challenges present themselves.

- **Contextualising the support** through providing SEs and ESOs with the power to determine how they would like to split the funding provided to build their resilience, as well as design their own success measures, meant that the activities were contextualised by design and that organisations felt ownership over their responses to the pandemic. This recognised the fact that the participating SEs and ESOs know their businesses and contexts the best. In order to do this effectively, it was important to have a well defined scope of work, with clear parameters and accessible, ongoing support from the implementing team. Providing flexibility in the types of activities that the funding can be used for, recognising the unprecedented impacts of the pandemic, was key and involved for some of the enterprises, subsidising costs that would allow them to fully engage in the program (e.g. their time) or co-funding key equipment that would be catalytic for them.

- **Trusted partners and advisors** were important to ensuring that enterprises felt comfortable indicating when things were not working. It was very valuable to have a level of trust and rapport already established, given these were organisations within DFAT and ygap’s networks. Having an implementing team who have worked with entrepreneurs and ESOs in the region before, and have a presence on the ground, was also key to providing relevant and timely support. Where possible, local technical advisors were also contracted to support participants, and local actors were leveraged for events. We recommend that future programming also considers the power dynamics at play within development programs, and where possible, prioritise leadership and ownership to come from within the region. Further to this, we recommend exploring further ways in which to streamline program administration where rapport has already been established through previous partner programs.

- **Fostering peer to peer support.** There was a clear appetite for peer to peer exchanges, instead of the traditional master/apprentice model, when it came to tackling challenges that pertained to being an ESO or SE in the region. Whilst we had a few thematics throughout the program, participating organisations would have valued further forums through which to support one another. We recommend that future programs explore how to facilitate this.
Opportunities For Future Programs

Through this program we identified several opportunities and challenged that future programs could try and address.

1. Continuing support to these organisations. When asked what kind of support they would find useful in the future, participants responded:

- **ESOs**
  - Funding for future programs
  - Networks for multi-sector collaboration
  - Networks for partnerships, funding and investment
  - Partnerships for program delivery

- **SEs**
  - Partnerships and networking opportunities
  - Funding
  - Mentoring

2. Encouraging enterprises to share knowledge, resources and customers by partnering with one another. Encouraging enterprises that have aligned objectives and values to partner with one another can lead to exchanging trade contacts, knowledge, data, resources and/or gain economies of scale on shipping, facilities, and other value chain components. We have seen an expansion of the barter system during the pandemic across the islands, so we know that products and services can be valued and exchanged peer to peer. Why not do this from enterprise to enterprise? This could be formalised by having opportunities for entrepreneurs to support each other with equity offerings (or other type of stake) in each other’s businesses, so that both entrepreneurs are invested in seeing the other’s business succeed.

3. Strengthening entrepreneurs support organisations to act as knowledge brokers and data intermediaries. In the Pacific Islands, market data can be difficult to come by, making it challenging for entrepreneurs to inform their business decisions. Often entrepreneurs themselves collect a lot of valuable data as they are out in the field speaking with their clients and partners. Entrepreneur support organisations do too as a result of working directly with those entrepreneurs but also with a wide group of organisations in the ecosystem, such as governments, development organisations, universities, private sector organisations, etc. Entrepreneur support organisations could play a role in collecting, aggregating and sharing data that entrepreneurs can use to grow their businesses. For example, if a social enterprise is looking to expand from Samoa to Fiji, could they reach out to an ESO based in Fiji and get access to market and contextual data that can inform their expansion plans into the country. ESOs are currently very focussed on networking and peer learning and have limited capacity to support analytical and proactive research.

4. Investing in human capital and growing teams. It is very common to have husband and wife or family teams building businesses in the Pacific Islands. Whilst this can be a strength for a business, it can also hinder the growth of the enterprise when negative power dynamics exist, roles aren’t clear, etc. There is an opportunity to explore how to support these teams to understand each other’s individual strengths, defining clear roles and establishing productive boundaries as well as communication and conflict resolution channels. Outside of family teams, one common challenge for founders is finding a second in charge who is as passionate about the vision and mission of their organisation as they are. Culturally, some of our participants shared that their employees are motivated to go to work to make money to give back to their family, community and tribe, as opposed to being motivated to achieve impact through their work, which can make it harder for social enterprises to compete for talent. Finally, there are a significant number of skilled Fijians who lost their jobs during the pandemic. An opportunity exists to support them in understanding how they could repurpose their skills and use them within the development sector and social entrepreneurship space.

5. Supporting the development of accessible markets. Throughout the program, opportunities were revealed to create more accessible markets for social enterprises to feed into existing supply chains of larger businesses who would normally source their supplies elsewhere, through social procurement. A big light was also shone on the potential for e-commerce to be a game changer for the region, and the various barriers that businesses have to overcome to access these opportunities currently.